

Modern Culture influences on the Aborigines

by Andreas Lommel, Oceania, September 1950

AS a member of the Frobenius Expedition sent to Australia in 1938, I had the opportunity to collect some data about the influence of modern culture on the life of the aborigines in the Kimberley Division in north-west Australia.

In Australia the influence seems to be mainly a psychological phenomenon. Psychological changes can be distinguished before any change of the material culture has taken place, and even after the beginning of material acculturation the consequences of the influence of modern culture on the psychological sphere seem to be more significant for the process of acculturation and assimilation.

As is generally known, the Australian aborigines have almost disappeared from the southern part of the continent. A demographic record of the year 1933 gives the number of the natives of Australia as 80,710, of whom 60,101 are recorded as fullbloods; 36,000 of these are still living as nomads, whereas 23,000 live in a semi-civilised state in the surroundings of white settlements.

Our research was concentrated mainly on three tribes in the Kimberley Division : The Ungarinyin, the Worora and the Unambal. In the territory of the first tribe are the Government Station, Munja on the bank of the Walcott Inlet and one station on the Sale River. The second tribe lives concentrated in the vicinity of the Kunmunya Mission. The Unambal inhabit the country farther north between the Prince Regent River and Cape Voltaire. With the exception of an old and solitary dingo-trapper south of the Prince Regent River the Unambal had no white settler in their territory, but they frequently visited the Kunmunja Mission.

The members of these three tribes lived in almost every imaginable state between undisturbed original culture and complete absorption. There were at least in the year 1938 still a few older individuals who had never seen a white man and who knew of modern culture only by hearsay, but they all had occasionally seen a plane circling over their country. On the other hand, there were individuals at their station and the mission who had lived there since their childhood and worked as stockboys and common labourers. In the small coastal towns, Broome and Derby, aborigines and some half-castes worked as car-drivers and in shops. They were completely absorbed in modern culture and had no contact with their fellow tribesmen in the hinterland; but they exerted a strong influence on the occasional visitors from Munja and Kunmunya.

There were, of course, numerous states between those extremes, but generally three groups

could be distinguished in the Kimberley Division. There were aborigines living in contact with modern culture on the farm, the mission and the Government Station. These men, stockboys and station-hands, wearing European clothes, had preserved fragments of their language, but apparently little else. Their model was the American cowboy as they knew him from Wild West films in the open-air cinemas of the coastal towns. They were unable to live and nourish themselves in the bush and had never learnt how to hunt kangaroos with spears or how to collect edible roots.

A second group lived as only temporary workers on the station. Its members knew modern culture by contact, and they appreciated sugar, tea, tobacco and blankets. Half of the year they lived in the bush as nomadic hunters like their ancestors, their economic life being enriched only by a few matches, tools and clothes. They found themselves in a transition phase and were the connecting link with the third group. This last was very small. It consisted of some shy, timid, and mostly older, individuals who hid themselves carefully in the rugged hinterland and avoided contact with modern culture. Economically, they kept completely to the frame of their old nomadic culture; they used weapons of wood and stone, and preserved a Stone Age way of life.

Even so the impact of modern culture made itself strongly felt in the third group. These individuals who had never seen a white man were irritated and frightened by the rumours they heard about him and his devices. Of these they knew the plane and, when living near the sea, also the strange spectacle of a lighted steamboat passing by at night. As their economic life remained unchanged, the influence of modern culture was restricted entirely to the psychological sphere but was strong enough to change their life considerably.

Their economic conditions were favourable: kangaroos were abundant everywhere. The Government regarded the country, which was of little use to white men, as a sort of native reservation, and generally prohibited visiting adventurers, traders, and possible settlers from entering it. Thus, contact could take place in an exceptionally friendly way at the mission and the two stations, and those who preferred to remain in the hinterland could remain there unmolested.

We had the opportunity to know for months members of all the three groups, those of the third group belonging to the Unambal exclusively and to converse with them with the help of indigenous interpreters and to become acquainted with their way of life. Everywhere the result of the slightest contact seemed to be a falling birth-rate and a disintegrating social organisation. In spite of favourable economic and hygienic conditions in the Kunmunya Mission, the decline of the birth-rate was evident even here. Social organisation was tottering also among the Unambal, who were the least influenced by contact with white men.

A few individuals of this tribe were living almost isolated from the rest, old and childless. Only on a special occasion did they emerge from the hinterland and join their fellow tribesmen.

Such an occasion was the arrival of a new secret cult, into which the men of the Unambal tribe had to be initiated. This cult was in full bloom among the Ungarinyin as well as the Worora, whereas only a few Unambal men had been initiated so far. As I studied this cult after having been admitted myself, I had the impression that besides reviving old traditions, it was a synthesis of the aborigines' old mythic conception of the universe with new elements brought in, that it was an attempt to assimilate modern culture in a genuine way, and that in this attempt the men of different stages of contact were united. Thus, besides the falling birth-rate and the disintegrating social organisation, this cult seemed to be the most interesting phenomenon resulting from the contact situation.

Wherever a closer contact takes place, a falling birth-rate may usually be ascribed to introduced diseases or declining economic conditions. But here, things could not be explained that way. It appeared that the news of modern culture alone was sufficient to destroy the aborigines' concept of the universe. All these rumours about the white men who looked pale like the spirits of the dead, of their ships, motor-cars and aeroplanes seemed to disturb these primitives deeply and produce a remarkable effect on their cultural and biological existence.

Psychic conditions seem to effect their physical well-being far more than we would consider normal. The aborigines maintain that, if we translate in our own terminology what they said, their reproductive abilities depend not only on their physical well-being but on their psychic balance as well. Many conversations with aborigines suggested that rumours and tales of modern culture, as well as a merely superficial contact with it, destroy not only their concept of the universe but also upset their psychic balance enough to diminish their reproductive abilities. The missionary of Kunmunya, the late Rev. J. B. Love, who had concentrated around his mission almost the whole Worora of over 200 persons, clearly saw that it was dying out fast : only about one-tenth of the whole population was under 20 years.

There were, however, no discernible material reasons for this state of affairs. Economic conditions were excellent and the mission kept a close eye on sanitary conditions. The missionary talked things over with the men and several times did so in my presence. It became clear that the aborigines regarded a special psychic disposition, which they called a 'dream,' as the cause of pregnancy.

Intimations to have more frequent intercourse with their wives remained meaningless to them. There, in the mission, the problem of ignorance of physical paternity did not exist. The physical facts had been brought to their knowledge by discussions with white persons, but still they regarded those facts from a different point of view. To them the physical act of generation was more or less insignificant ; the accent was on a psychic condition a 'dream' which they regarded as being of biological importance concerning their procreative disposition. Men of the hinterland who had almost no contact with whites referred to those 'dreams' as the one and only, or at least the main, reason of paternity.

Those who had talked about these questions with white persons frequently still insisted on the 'dream' as indispensable but admitted that intercourse had also a function. Moreover, they always were ready to state that things might be quite different amongst white persons and animals.

These 'dreams' involve all the mythical and totemic ideas. The first and creative beings of their Genesis transformed themselves, 'dreaming' again and again, into the animals and plants, which they were creating. One of these beings is a mythical snake called Ungud, which represents the water. From that snake originates an anthropomorphic called Wandjina, representing rain and fertility. In the depth of wells, which resist the heat of the summer, these two beings are incessantly creating so-called 'spirit children', souls of children to be born.

To beget a child a man has to find such a soul or 'spirit child' first. He finds it in a particular dream in which the name of the spirit child, containing the vital essence of the future child, comes to his conscious mind. The aborigines maintain that to make such a 'dream' possible sleep must not be too heavy. The name of the 'spirit child' goes first to the heart of the dreamer and later into his head; he then is thinking like a white man, that is, he becomes fully conscious of the name. A man lacking strength either in his heart or in his head cannot keep the name and therefore cannot pass on that 'spirit child' to his wife. He then is incapable of begetting a child and will try to borrow a spirit child's name from a medicine-man.

The aborigines declare that such 'child-dreams' have become very rare to-day. Those who work on stations say that heavy work exhausts them so that their sleep becomes too heavy. They cannot catch the name of the 'spirit child' any more. Those of the hinterland say that all their dreams are too much troubled by visions of the white man, of aeroplanes and ships. So they always dream of these things and have no 'child dreams' any more.

Taking into account the extraordinary sensibility of the aborigines, we may assume that for physical paternity a psychic disposition might well be indispensable for them, and we may as well consider it as justified their reasoning about the causes of their falling birth-rates. The disturbance caused by approaching modern culture by direct contact or even by rumour may be sufficient to upset their emotional balance in such a degree that the psychic disposition necessary for the physical act of generation will not be attained any more.

In a similar but less distinct way modern culture may act on other primitive peoples, whereas reasoning may not be as clear as in this case. All the aborigines are inclined to regard misadventures and accidents as the result of some magic action against them. The psychological treatment of maladies or injuries is more important than the medical one. The magical action of the possible enemy has to be counteracted by the magic of the medicine-man.

A group lives under the same fear as the individual. For instance, lack of success in hunting

during several consecutive days may lead a group to believe itself to be the victim of an evil spell. Heavy depression and apathy will render it incapable of any further action. Here then the medicine-man's function begins. He will sing magical songs with the men for a whole night and hypnotise them into a cheerful and self-reliant mood. The psychic pre-disposition of the aborigines makes the medicine-man a necessity. He is the centre of their social organism. He keeps this position even at the stations or the mission: there life offers so many puzzling questions that the spiritual leadership by a strong character is as necessary as in the bush. But a genuine medicine-man may be helpless in this new and strange atmosphere.

Thus he sometimes is replaced by a younger man who speaks some English and is experienced in the ways of the whites. This advantage, however, may be paid for by a loss of those subtler qualities which distinguish a real medicine-man. It is not personality alone that makes a medicine-man; tradition and circumstances require that he should undergo certain special psychic experiences in order to be able to act. These alone guarantee the qualities necessary to himself and to his fellow tribesmen, and it is here that the influence of the culture makes itself felt: the psychic experiences which give a medicine-man his power are no more attainable because the whole psychic atmosphere of the natives is disturbed.

Further, as soon as the medicine-man loses the ability to function as the centre of the social organism, the organism dissolves. The psychic experiences were described to us very exactly and mostly referred to as 'dreams'. Informants were both older and younger men. Some of them claimed to have had these experiences themselves, others modestly admitted that they related experiences of others only. One Unambal and one Worora man insisted on having undergone those experiences themselves and related the 'dreams' in their own version.

The decisive experience or 'dream' is preceded by many others which are regarded as a good omen. In them the dreamer sees himself back to his origin, in the water. He sees many appearances, which are related to water, as water plants and trees growing at the riverside. The decisive experience may plunge the dreamer in a sort of coma, which may last for several days. During this the dreamer feels as though he were diving into the deepest water. There he communicates with the first creative being: the Ungud-snake, who endows him with special psychic powers. After these psychic experiences, a new medicine-man is for some time the disciple of some older ones who teach him the practical tricks of the routine work. Then he is regarded as ready.

The decisive experiences are described as follows : The soul of the man who is going to be a medicine-man goes away from him. His body is lying there asleep. It is a heavy sleep, and nobody dares to wake him up even if this sleep should last for several days. The soul goes far away to the place from whence it originated. There in the depth it finds a brilliantly lighted cave in which two snakes are copulating and incessantly engendering 'spirit children'.

Many of them unite with the soul of the dreamer who thus becomes richer and stronger in psychic powers than common men. Other descriptions speak of a medicine which the man receives in the depth. It is believed that this looks like transparent crystals. They penetrate him through his shoulder, his navel or his penis. The strength which is given is then located in his belly.

The descriptions of the decisive experiences never differentiate between physical and the psychic existence. Generally the aborigines speak of how 'he' dives into the water, receives the medicine and rises to the surface of the water again. Only after very exact questioning it becomes clear that the body is lying asleep on the ground, whereas 'he' means the soul which goes down to meet the Ungud-snake. For the aborigines there is no difference between an experience during a dream and an experience in real life. Both spheres have the same reality, and they are unable to separate them.

We may call this decisive experience a communication with the subconscious. The efficiency of the medicine-man depends on his ability to communicate with his subconscious whenever he wants to do so. As soon as the psychic balance of the aborigines is disturbed, the abilities of the medicine-man seem to vanish and he is unable to function. If the disturbance is deep enough, the development also of new medicine-men may be precluded.

It seems impossible for the younger generation to attain the necessary decisive psychic experiences which make a medicine-man. There are other psychic experiences which belong to the traditional abilities of a medicine-man. At present these seem to become rare events, whereas in normal times in the past they seem to have been rather common. 'Flying' is one of these experiences.

The medicine-man is believed to be able to send his soul away over long distances. The soul sees everything that is going on in foreign countries and returns and relates it to him. Generally, even normal dreams are regarded as journeys of the soul, and visions of the dreamer are interpreted as adventures during these journeys. So the dreams of the medicine-man can be regarded as particularly impressive and colourful psychic experiences. Sometimes such dreams are dreamt collectively.

Several men led by a medicine-man fall in trance and have the same dream together at the same time. During such a dream he destroys the soul of one of the men and enriches his own psychic power by the sacrifice. We do not know the real nature of these 'flying' dreams and the 'sacrifice'. We may regard it as a sort of transfer of psychic energy from one individual to another, the loss of energy causing the death of the giver.

The fact that such experiences are so far unknown to us does not necessarily mean that such an experience cannot exist elsewhere. In August 1938 I was told of such a 'sacrifice' by older Unambal men as follows (as usual the narrators made no difference between events

during dreams or states of trance and those of outward reality : they told their tales without modification, and it was left to me to distinguish between the different states of consciousness) :

“The men sit down with the medicine-man and sing. The medicine-man takes a great snake out of the water and the men sit themselves astride on it. The snake flies with them through the air. After some time they arrive in a foreign land. They sit down around the snake. The medicine-man takes a stone knife and kills one of the men. He cuts him into pieces and gives those pieces to the snake. The other men sit around quietly and look on as the snake swallows the pieces. Then they themselves also eat of the flesh of their fellow man. The medicine-man cleans the bones of the killed one and lays them on the earth.

He lays them in the opposite way from what they should be laid in natural order. He lays the thigh bones at the shoulder and vice versa. Then the other men return riding on the flying snake; but the medicine-man remains with the skeleton. He sings magical songs and the bones are re-covered with flesh. The killed one comes to life. The medicine-man produces a second snake out of his navel and the two men ride home on this one. After that all the men wake abruptly and do not know at the moment what has happened to them. Only later they remember faintly all the events during their sleep. The sacrificed man then dreams of a snake and dies in a few days.”

At present, these powers and phenomena are ceasing to be manifested. Always when mentioning the medicine-men and their psychic power the aborigines emphasise the fact that really great medicine-men do not exist any longer. The medicine-men themselves agree modestly with this opinion and point out that without great medicine-men the aborigines are going to vanish.

With approaching civilisation the psychic balance of these men is so much upset that they are unable to have the same psychic experiences as their ancestors. To day, as they become unable to 'dream', they are inclined to regard the stories as reports of events in the real world. They expect their medicine-man to perform 'diving, flying and sacrificing' in a visible and material way. Civilisation leads them towards a misinterpretation of their original abilities.

In north-west Australia, for example, the white doctor nearly always appears in an aeroplane at the settlements in case of an emergency. These planes were seen also by those aborigines who in their lifetime never met a white man. They know from accounts of others that the white men are able to fly. Now they expect their own medicine-men to do the same. Moreover, the latter, believing that the medicine-men of old times could fly in reality, feel themselves inferior.

When the story of the sacrifice was related to me, it was at once compared with an account

of a medical operation in a hospital at Broome where some aborigines from the Kunmunya mission apparently had been present. The white medicine-man, I was told, could make a man fall asleep deeply, open his body without him feeling any pains. He could close the wound again and wake him up. Afterwards the victim would be without any knowledge of what had happened to him during his sleep.

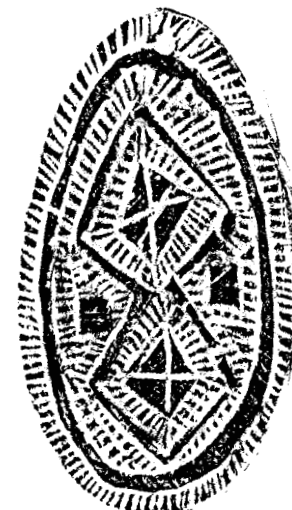
A New Cult. Besides the falling birth-rate, the destruction of the psychic atmosphere, and the biological and social changes caused by contact with modern culture, there is a cultural phenomenon of more positive aspect brought about by contact. A new cult is migrating from one tribe to the other, combining old features with new ones. It seems to be a synthesis of the old and the new way of life, a synthesis in genuine aboriginal style.

Possibly, dances and perhaps also cults migrating from tribe to tribe belong, as a structural element, to the original culture of Australia. This migration seems to have connected tribes with each other and to have conveyed new elements. This was obvious at least in the case of the cult we observed in three tribes of northern Kimberley, where it showed considerable strength and influence.

Coming to a tribe, this cult is attended by all the individuals with utmost concentration. The traditional mythical ideas are not impaired. On the contrary, the new cult absorbs and revitalises them. It is like a psychic wave, for at indeterminate intervals a new one may appear and flow from tribe to tribe. This idea occurred to me when I learned that the cult in question has been preceded by another one now out of date. Something of the nature of the processes of assimilation and acculturation became understandable by observing this cult. Its advent was known long before it actually arrived; people were psychologically prepared for it, and its arrival brought about a new situation heralding possible developments.

Modern culture is received by these primitives not as something real but as a mythical ghost or a figure. This figure is a personification of all the features of modern culture known to the aborigines. At the same time it retains features of the old mythical ghosts. Thus modern culture is assimilated to a certain extent to the old ideas in imagination. In this respect the new cult unites half-castes, full-bloods on stations, as well as the folk of the desolate hinterland, and so creates a new race consciousness.

The symbols of one of the spreading cults were wooden slabs of roughly Tjurunga form painted red and yellow. The only thing we could find out about them was that they were connected with emu meat. The cult in-question was no longer alive, and people talked freely about it and offered the tablets for a low price. Another cult called Kurrangara was coming slowly from the south.



Tjurunga

The Ungarinjin were already initiated and most of the Worora were, while some of them and the greater part of the Unambal were still awaiting admission. Secrecy and awe penetrated everything in connection with this new and powerful cult. Special initiation was necessary also for us and was offered only after months of daily contact. We were initiated into the Kurrangara cult at a place called Wurewuri, which was not too far away from the modest hut of the old trapper south of the Prince Regent River. As the cult had to take place in the vicinity of white settlements, this place was the one nearest to the Unambal and all the dances and initiations were celebrated there. The members carefully explained to us that the slabs were endowed with an enormous power, a sort of poison with which the initiated had to be filled gradually by rubbing his body with smaller slabs lest he would die. When fully initiated a member radiated this power and had to clean himself carefully after each ceremony.



Aborigine dance and initiation. Photo Andreas Lommel 1938

Without this precaution he would kill all persons who were excluded from membership. After being initiated properly, we had the opportunity to watch the initiation of some Unambal men from the hinterland who had travelled to this place for several days with the only purpose of participating in the new power. The dances and the initiation ceremony arranged for them was, though somewhat more detailed, basically the same as that which we had gone through.

The old trapper had never been initiated, and the cult as well as the slabs were kept away from him though not very strictly. The whole cult was hidden absolutely, however, from the missionary of the Kunmunja mission, Mr. Love, who had taught the aborigines not to mention in his presence any sinful subject such as magic or sex. He thus had barred himself from any deeper knowledge (though he was an expert as far as their material culture was concerned).



Examining slabs. Photo Andreas Lommel 1938

At the Kurrangara dancing ground at Wurewuri were assembled Unambal men with Ungarinyin from Sale River Station and Worora from Kunmunya mission; the latter spoke to us about the cult only after the repeated warning not to tell anything to the missionary. With regard to their reactions to the cult, which was quite new to them, the Unambal were especially interesting; they were deeply impressed and absorbed. The Ungarinyin, who had known of the cult for some time, handed it on to their neighbours, acting as pre-eminent men with a certain benevolent superiority.

Dr. H. Petri, the leader of our expedition, studied the Kurrangara cult in the Ungarinyin territory, whereas I found an opportunity to do so chiefly with Unambal informants. Comparing our notes later, we found that we had covered two different aspects of the cult, namely the full development of it among the Ungarinjin and its initial phase among the Unambal, where its relation to the preceding cult seemed to be comparatively clearly visible. The Kurrangara myth as told by Unambal was linked with the myth of the preceding cult, which, however, was already out of date for at least one generation, as only older people could give any information about it. The slabs which were the symbol of the older cult were said to have come from the home of a ghost in the north named Nguniai. Nguniai was regarded as inventor of many tools and laws, and even the invention of circumcision was ascribed to him. He has human appearance; only at his elbows, long and sharp knives stand out.

With these bone knives he cuts the slabs out of trees and ornaments them. Nguniai lives in a big house erected on four poles. Another ghost called Vaybalma steals the slabs from time to time and runs away with them. The persecuting Nguniai has considerable difficulties in finding the thief's track on the sand; he can only see it on hard stone. This is because in the world of the ghosts everything is contrary to things in the human world. Thus the thief avoids stony ground and after a successful flight gives the slabs to the men.

The more modern cult is connected with the older one by its myth. Tjanba, the ghost producing slabs for this cult, is a son of Nguniai. He migrated from north to south and is believed to live in the southern desert today, from where the Kurrangara slabs are coming. The Kurrangara slabs follow exactly the way of the slabs of the older cult mentioned above only in the opposite direction. Thus they will naturally one day reach the region inhabited by Nguniai. The moment Nguniai sees the first of his son's slabs he will stop producing them himself and then, the myth concludes, life on earth will come to an end.

In the myth of Tjanba, some of the characteristics of this ghost are borrowed from modern culture : his house is of corrugated iron and below it grow poisonous weeds. Tjanba is able to impart the hitherto unknown diseases of leprosy and syphilis by means of little sticks which have lain in those weeds overnight. Men who possess Kurrangara slabs are able to infect other people. Tjanba hunts with a rifle and ornaments his slabs with iron tools. To distribute his slabs to men (some of his slabs are stolen, others he himself sends out) he uses aeroplanes, motor cars and steamers. When showing the slabs to his fellow ghosts, he asks them for tea, sugar and bread.

Following the myth, the modern cult demands exuberant feasts with tea, sugar, bread and as much beef as possible but no meat of any indigenous animal. The cult places have to be in the vicinity of stations. The cult language is pidgin-English. The cult is directed by a 'boss,' the slabs are stored away by a 'clerk,' the feasts are announced by a 'mailman,' and order and discipline during them is maintained by some specially appointed 'pickybas' (from police-boys).

The Kurrangara cult, which absolutely excludes women, intensifies the cultural life of the aborigines and temporarily brings back something similar to the psychic atmosphere of the old time, though in a somewhat sinister version. The former medicine-man is replaced by the 'boss.' The introduction into the cult replaces the former initiation and makes the deepest impression on individuals, who at this moment believe themselves to be face to face with a power that at will distributes life and death.

The 'boss' has the power to kill and to heal, to infect other people with, or protect his adherents against, leprosy and syphilis. His methods are essentially the same as those of the old medicine-men; only the symbols have changed. It is now no longer the snake-Ungud, but the Kurrangara slab which incorporates life and death. Those slabs sometimes bigger

than a man are painted red, black and white. The person under an evil spell sees, dreaming, how his Kurrangara slab disintegrates or becomes shabby, whereas the dream announcing recovery shows the slab fresh and newly painted. The water symbol maintains its salutary meaning: the slab in danger is cooled or cleaned in the water.

The cult is remarkable as an expression of some assimilation of elements of modern culture as the aborigines conceive them. At the same time, it is the expression of a change in their cultural state. This becomes especially clear when we consider the fact that time has also changed its aspect in the new myth of the Kurrangara cult. Hitherto there was no concept of a future. There was only an 'eternal dream time' uniting the beginning of the world and the present. The past was more important than the present, the latter being only a reflection of the former. Now the past is fading away and the present derives its importance from a future with a menacing end of the world.

The new conception of time clearly shows the new psychic condition of the aborigines: the preponderance of the subconscious (expressed in the importance of the past and the 'eternal dream time') gives way to a stronger degree of consciousness which has arisen through their altered relation to time and environment. They now are far more conscious of their actual living conditions, as well as of themselves. One can note the faint beginning of a feeling of racial homogeneity.

This feeling could, under different circumstances, be the beginning of a new cultural activity but, in the circumstances, it does not hold any promise for the future. The future is felt to be extremely dark, and a deep melancholy and apathy are salient characteristics of the present attitude. This attitude finds its artistic expression in the Kurrangara myth and dances an expression darkened still more by additional mythological features linked with the cult.

The Unambal informants, who were deeply impressed by the approaching end of the world, told me that this is going to be announced by the arrival of different Kurrangara slabs sent out by Tjanba's wife. As soon as these slabs are distributed the social order will be completely reversed: women will take the place of men; they will arrange the feasts and hand on the slabs, whereas the men will gather edible roots, without being allowed to participate in the feasts. My informants used to speak of these inevitable events with serious apprehension and to link them with another cult, which they expected soon to arrive from the north, but of which some already claimed to know the essentials.

This newest cult was called Maui, and despite the fact that it was to come from the north it was regarded as something very similar to the cult of Tjanba's wife. Maui also was associated with venereal diseases, and I was told that its poison made these diseases spread. Kurrangara and the approaching Maui were both regarded as dangerous and they both made the aborigines concentrate on the imminent future, which was believed to be the end of everything alive.

An eschatological myth may have been part of the aborigines' traditions, but now the approach of modern culture with so many fateful elements accompanying it certainly makes the aborigines concentrate on the end of the world.

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